

# LET THE S.T.F.U. NEWS

Vol. 1, No. 4

July-August, 1938

Issued by  
SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION  
P.O. BOX 5215  
Memphis, Tenn.

## WPA TO EMPLOY FARM LABOR

According to an announcement made at Washington, D. C. by WPA Administrator Harry L. Hopkins, 200,000 unemployed farm workers in the southern states will be employed on WPA projects. The quotas for individual states have not yet been announced. Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri will each be given several thousand more WPA jobs. All members of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union who are unemployed are eligible for certification for these WPA projects. Sharecroppers and tenants who have crops this year are not eligible and will not be given work.

This addition of 200,000 agricultural workers to be employed by WPA is the first instance of government attention to the rural unemployed, as such, under the relief program. The two hundred thousand in the south who will get these jobs should know that the Southern Tenant Farmers Union is largely responsible for this increase in the WPA rolls.

It is reported that the rural housing program as outlined by H. L. Mitchell at the conference of the National Emergency Council in Washington on July 5th is also being given consideration by government authorities.

## ARKANSAS ECONOMIC CONFERENCE ENDORSES STFU PROGRAM

A conference of liberal and labor groups met in Little Rock on July 23rd, with representatives of the S.T.F.U. present. A legislative program was adopted and an organization set up to further this program. D. A. Griffin, State Organizer for the S.T.F.U., was elected to the executive committee. The program adopted condemned the use of millions of dollars for building battleships, and urged the U.S. government to enter into a program of rural housing for the unemployed sharecroppers and tenants. Repeal of the Poll Tax was set as the major objective of the conference.

The travelling seminar of the Religion and Labor Foundation, under the leadership of Dr. Willard Uphaus, was present to hear discussion of Arkansas' economic problems. Speakers included E. I. McKinley, Arkansas Labor Commissioner, Roy E. Prewitt, secretary of the Committee to Repeal the Poll Tax, Dr. M. F. Dickinson, President of the Arkansas Farmers Union, and a number of others.

## COTTON PREACHERS HOLD CONFERENCE

A conference which will be attended by a number of S.T.F.U. ministers, both Negro and white, is being held at Little Rock during the weekend of July 28th to 31st. Purnell Benson, Education Field Director of the S.T.F.U., and D. A. Griffin, Arkansas State Organizer, are scheduled to address the gathering. According to announcements the ministers will study the role of the Church in advancing the cause of social justice. The conference is being sponsored by C. C. Williams, a member of the S.T.F.U. Executive Council.

## OKLAHOMA STFU NEWS

Odis L. Swedden, State Organizer for Oklahoma, reports that a meeting was held recently in Bristow, Okla., with approximately 700 members present. Swedden further reports that the S.T.F.U. was again recognized as the agency for collective bargaining for rural WPA workers. He reports progress in re-organizing southeastern Oklahoma, and says plans are being made to organize the Red River Valley region in Texas.

LETTER TO STFU  
FROM YMCA AND YWCA SUMMER SEMINAR

Dear Union Members,

The group of students who have been visiting the Southern Tenant Farmers Union during the month of July wish to express their appreciation of the hospitality they have received.

We spent our first week in Woodruff County. The colored students stayed in Cotton Plant and Mr. Griffin took charge of the white students who all stayed in Morton with union members. Everyone treated us royally. The boys went hunting and the girls went blackberrying, and every night we attended a union meeting or one of Mr. Benson's classes.

It was hard to leave our good friends there, but we had to push on to the Delta Cooperative Farm. We had lunch with the students of the Work Camp down there, and spent a day looking at the new farm in Providence, Miss. We were very much interested to see cooperation working there.

Our next visit was to Mississippi County, where Mr. Moore was our host. He took us up to see the Resettlement project at Laforge, Mo., where we called on Mrs. O. H. Whitfield. Unfortunately Mr. Whitfield was away preaching. The high spot of our stay in Blytheville was a meeting given by the union local in honor of Rosetta Gardner and Lewis Watts, our two colored students.

We stopped at Marked Tree to see Mr. T. C. Carpenter, the lawyer, and talk to him about civil liberties in Arkansas. Then we went on to Forrest City to see the work in St. Francis County. Mr. Hynds kindly drove us around the country and took us to union meetings at night, and we enjoyed our visit a great deal.

All of us are going to take back to other parts of the country where we live the story of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. We are very much impressed with the work that all of you are doing, and we wish you increased success in your fight to organize and get land for the landless. We are sorry we were not able to visit more places, but we thank you again from our hearts for the things you have done for us, and we hope another group can have the same experience next summer.

Sincerely yours,

The NICC Students.

HEALTH SURVEY IN WOODRUFF COUNTY

The students who were visiting the S.T.F.U. during July were able to make a small survey of health conditions in Woodruff County, Ark. The union is planning to use their results in connection with the Governor's Commission on Tenancy.

Only 120 families were covered, which meant 483 people. Of forty-three deaths which occurred in these families during the last three years only thirteen had a doctor during the last illness. Only eleven mothers out of thirty-nine who had children during the same period had a doctor's care at childbirth. Only 39% of the houses had adequate screens; 75% had leaking roofs. Some families reported that they could not afford to have a needed operation, and some said that they could not even afford to buy jars so that they could can fruits and vegetables for the winter months.

The program of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union is to improve conditions like these, so that every family can have a decent home and a doctor's care when they need it.

MITCHELL TO INSPECT GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

H. L. Mitchell, Secretary of the S.T.F.U., has recently received an appointment as a special consultant for the National Youth Administration, and during the month of August will visit and inspect NYA projects in the southeastern states. He will return at the beginning of September to resume his duties as secretary of the S.T.F.U.

ORGANIZE TO REPEAL POLL TAX

The voters of Arkansas will have an opportunity in November to vote on whether the Poll Tax will continue to be a requirement for voting. A constitutional amendment will be on the ballot in the November election, and every union member who has a Poll Tax receipt should vote for this measure. He should urge his friends to do likewise. A Committee composed of prominent Arkansas citizens has been formed to work for repeal of the Poll Tax. However workers and farmers throughout the state should realize that this is their fight. They are the men who stand to gain by the abolition of the Poll Tax. Let the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union take the lead in this struggle in Arkansas and ORGANIZE TO REPEAL THE POLL TAX.

UNION ORGANIZER ATTENDS PEACE INSTITUTE

Brother F. R. Betton of Woodruff County recently attended an Anti-War Institute held at the North Central College, Naperville, Illinois. A free scholarship to this Institute was made available to the Union through Purnell Benson, Educational Director of the S.T.F.U. This scholarship was awarded to Brother Betton on the basis of his fine record of work in the Union. He attended the Institute for one week and reported that everyone he met there was very interested in the work of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Before returning to his work as organizer of the Union he spoke to large groups in Chicago and Detroit, telling them about the problems faced by southern agricultural workers and the work being done by the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union to solve these problems. Brother Betton is now doing organizing work in Jefferson County, Arkansas.

PURNELL BENSON IN CHICAGO

Purnell Benson, Educational Director of the S.T.F.U. who has spent the last two months conducting workers education classes in Woodruff County left this week for Chicago. He will return to the Union very soon and continue his fine educational services.

ORGANIZER'S SON SERIOUSLY ILL

All union members who know D. A. Griffin, State Organizer for Arkansas, (and there are few who do not) will be grieved to hear of the illness of his son, D. C. Griffin. Brother Griffin's other son, Cecil, who has been attending the Southern Summer School for Workers in Asheville, North Carolina, has been called home to be with his family at this time. Few men have given such untiring and selfless devotion to a cause as Griffin has to the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, and we want him to know that his union brothers everywhere are sharing his present anxiety and hoping with him that D. C. will soon recover.

MASS MEETING TO BE HELD

BROTHER LEO MAXWELL AND BROTHER C. J. SPRADLING WISH TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE EARLE LOCAL WILL HOLD A MASS MEETING AT THE RIVER BRIDGE NEAR MADISON ARKANSAS ON THE ROAD TO FOREST CITY ON AUGUST 21st. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE AS WELL AS LOCAL OFFICERS AND MEMBERS WILL SPEAK. ALL UNION MEMBERS ARE URGED TO ATTEND AND HELP MAKE THIS A MEMORIAL MEETING FOR CRITTENDEN COUNTY.

WPA TO HIRE FARM LABOR

HOPKINS OUTLINES PRESIDENT'S PLAN FOR SOUTH

Harry L. Hopkins, WPA administrator, speaking in Memphis on August 4th announced that sharecroppers, tenants and other unemployed farm workers would be given jobs on WPA as a means of increasing their cash income during off season periods of farming. The program as announced here provides for the immediate hiring of 200,000 heads of families, and, according to Hopkins, in less than two weeks thousands of farm families will receive their first checks.

Hopkins stated that rules for certification of farm workers would have to be changed to speed up the process of putting cash into the hands of those who are in need, and in order to take away the stigma of "relief" from this work. The WPA will employ tenants and sharecroppers during the time when there is no employment on the farm from two to four months each year. The projects will close down during the cotton picking season and will be resumed when the crops are laid by. The plan is to increase each families' income by \$100 to \$200 per year.

The program is in line with the policy laid down by President Roosevelt when he called the South the Nation's No. 1 Economic Problem. Roosevelt's four point attack on this problem, as outlined by Hopkins is as follows:

1. Aid the low income farmer by providing WPA work for him during off season months!
2. Give the South the same educational opportunities now enjoyed in other sections of the nation!
3. Attract new industries to the South thru cheap power, made possible by TVA!
4. Equalize health opportunities!

It must not be forgotten that it is due to the organized strength of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the unceasing efforts of its officers who have kept the problem of its members constantly before the eyes of the public and the Washington officials that this increase has been granted. We know that Washington wishes this program in behalf of the farm workers carried out. We know also that there may be attempts on the part of local officials to keep this from being done. In order to prevent discrimination against farm workers, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union must extend its organization to cover the midsouth. If these gains are to be held and the promised jobs secured the S.T.F.U. must build its organization now! Individuals can only secure their rights and make their wants known when they become members of an organization such as the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

Our program calls for the organization of all rural unemployed into our Union. Already in some cases the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union has been selected by the WPA as the agency for collective bargaining of rural unemployed workers.

ORGANIZE NOW FOR JOBS AND A DECENT WAGE IN THE SOUTH...BUILD THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS' UNION. EVERY MEMBER GET A MEMBER!